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O F F I C E O F N A T I O N A L E S T I M A T E S

5 May 1961

Draft

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Consequences for the US of the Abortive Attack on the Castro Regime: Some Preliminary Thoughts

1. The repercussions for US policy of the Cuban invasion episode seem on the whole unlikely to be very prolonged or profound. World reactions to date appear to have been determined in the main by pre-existing attitudes: governments and groups friendly toward the US and suspicious or hostile toward Castro remain so, and vice versa. Only in Latin America has the reaction been surprising. There do not appear to have been anti-US recriminations in the degree that might have been expected, and the growth of anti-Castro sentiment which had been noted earlier among governments and in informed public opinion does not appear to have been checked. In fact, Castro's exploitation of his victory by still more overt identification of his regime with Communist aims and policies has evidently stimulated such sentiment.

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2. These first opinion reactions are not, of course, the only, and perhaps not even the best means of trying to assess the implications for the US of the Cuban affair. Implications of a more lasting kind may emerge more gradually. As seen at present, however, the most significant general consequence has probably been the loss by the new US administration, at least for the time being, of the opportunity to give US policy a new aspect in many quarters; there appears to be a widespread tendency to believe that features of US policy which drew criticism earlier remain unchanged.

3. Beyond these generalizations, a few more particular implications, drawn in part from the reactions reported and in part from standing basic estimates, can be judged as likely at this time. They are necessarily highly tentative and speculative in nature.

(A) In Cuba itself, Castro is stronger than ever; his supporters are at a high pitch of enthusiasm; his opposition has been hard hit; he is likely to be given fuller political and material support by the Elrc.

(B) However, his position in Latin America is more isolated because of the increasing evidence of Communist control in Cuba. At the same time, most neighboring governments will be more eager than ever to stand aside from his sharpened and more dramatic conflict with the US.

(C) In Western Europe, there may for some time be increased concern in the minds of many government and public leaders over the wisdom and effectiveness of the way in which the US leadership employs its power. This is unlikely to have any significant effect on the Western alliance as such, but may mean that European allies will be more reluctant to accept the US lead in connection with the projected reexamination of NATO's mission and organization.

(D) Among the nationalist-neutralist nations, there may be increased concern about US willingness to interfere illicitly in the internal affairs of other countries. Most of them will see the period immediately ahead as unfavorable for rapprochement or obvious cooperation with the US.

(E) The effect of the Cuban affair on US strength and prestige will be the primary concern of US allies in the underdeveloped area. None of them are likely to change their basic policies, but most will probably be more concerned with the need to develop their own defenses against Communist subversion, and, perhaps, somewhat more doubtful of US abilities to help them in this regard.

4. To the Bloc, the most important result of the Cuban affair is the opportunity it has provided to put the US on the defensive all over the world. Moscow will try to maintain this situation as long as possible and, at the same time, to use the US "justification" of its Cuban policy as a basis for threats and alarms directed to US allies on its own periphery. More important, the Soviets are trying to make as costly as possible another attempt against Castro, which they almost certainly expect the US to launch. In the meantime, the USSR will probably provide increased economic and military assistance

to Cuba but seek to avoid any more binding commitment of its own prestige to Castro's survival; in contrast to Suez, Moscow has not gone very far in claiming that its own rocket threats paralyzed the aggressor and saved the victim.

5. To the extent that Khrushchev judges that he has put the US on the defensive, he may feel that he can press harder at other points of East-West confrontation. Certainly he must be tempted to maintain the momentum of recent weeks by following Gagarin's feat and Castro's success with a further blow against American prestige in the Laotian affair. In addition, the Chinese Communists probably judge that, with this new confirmation of their thesis that imperialism is incorrigible and at the same time weak, now is a good time to renew their pressures on Moscow for a generally harder Bloc course.

6. We believe that the Soviets over the last several months have already been responsive to this Chinese desire. The Cuban affair may in the Soviet view document a principal thesis of Communist policy in the current period -- that the US is deterred politically and militarily from bringing its full military power into play to effect counterrevolution and to oppose Communist gains. We think there is a good chance

therefore that Soviet policy may over the coming months prove still more venturesome and uncompromising. This depends to some extent, of course, on opportunities arising for Communist local pressures in areas where there are revolutionary developments in train, since we do not expect the Communists to open up any new fronts by open aggression.

7. We think the Bloc may have decided to push the Pathet Lao cause in Laos further and faster than it intended earlier. It is also possible that the Berlin question may be reopened sooner and pushed in a more aggressive way, although we still believe the Soviets seek a Berlin solution basically through negotiations and without provoking high tension and risk. If the Soviets do pursue a more assertive and forward policy in the coming months, they will still wish to avoid any too direct confrontation with the US under conditions of high tension and may indeed believe that the danger in such a development would be greater than before because of the possibility of more rash and dangerous US reactions due to frustrations and a desire to compensate for setbacks.